

**TOWN OF NORTHFIELD, VERMONT
SELECT BOARD REGULAR MEETING
Minutes of February 9, 2021**

- I. ROLL CALL.** Select Board Chair K. David Maxwell, Board members Julie H. Goodrich, Nathaniel Miller, Charles Morse, and John Stevens. Also present were Town Manager Jeff Schulz, Acting Clerk Kenneth McCann, Mark C. Anarumo (President, Norwich University), Daphne Larkin (Director of Media Relations & Community Affairs, Norwich University), Laura Stone PE (Vermont Agency of Transportation), Gary Laroche PE (Vermont Agency of Transportation), Chris Baker PE (Hardesty & Hanover, LLC), Patrick DeMasi, Peter J. DeMasi, Bonnie Donahue, Lydia Petty, Bill Clements, Carolyn Stevens, Lois Melander, Gerard LaVarnway, Susan Stillinger, and Shannon Doney.

Chair Maxwell called the meeting to order at 7:00 p.m. In keeping with Governor Phil Scott's COVID-19 "stay at home" directive, the meeting was held remotely.

- II. SET/ADJUST AGENDA.** Economic Development Director Jon Ignatowski will not be addressing the Select Board members tonight as originally scheduled. He will attend the next regular meeting (02/23/21) to discuss a potential grant application.

III. PUBLIC PARTICIPATION (SCHEDULED)

- a. Mark C. Anarumo, President, Norwich University (NU).** President Anarumo said the number of NU students now living on campus is about 1,360, which is about 600 fewer than had been expected. NU now allows any student to move off campus upon request and the resulting extra dormitory space has allowed the remaining students to spread out further. There now are thirty-five (35) NU students who are currently COVID-19 positive, which is down significantly from the previous high-water mark of eighty-nine (89). President Anarumo felt this indicates the current quarantine regime has been working well. He noted NU officials remain in contact with the Governor's Office to coordinate efforts to further reduce the number of active cases. President Anarumo had feared the new, more contagious strain of COVID-19 had reached the NU campus but recent testing results have shown otherwise. The campus still remains closed to visitors and the only allowed access is for weekly COVID-19 testing of off-campus students, faculty, etc. Board member Stevens felt President Anarumo and other NU officials are doing a good job. The other Select Board members also were grateful for the actions he has taken. Chair Maxwell thanked President Anarumo for his update tonight and he looks forward to his next appearance.
- b. Laura Stone PE, Vermont Agency of Transportation (VTrans): Main Street Bridge Scoping Report.** Manager Schulz noted VTrans had sent two (2) representatives (Ms. Stone and Gary Laroche) to present the completed Scoping Report for the Main Street Bridge Project. Also present is Chris Baker PE from the engineering firm Hardesty & Hanover, LLC. The report itself was distributed to the Select Board members for their regular meeting of November 10, 2020 and was put on the municipal website for public review. Individual letters also were sent to affected property owners and nearby merchants to inform them of tonight's discussion. Ms. Stone is the VTrans Scoping Engineer and she will take the lead in tonight's presentation. She said the purpose of tonight's meeting is to provide an understanding of VTrans' approach to the project, discuss possible project constraints, discuss the approach favored by VTrans, and answer any questions Select Board members or others might have. Ms. Stone noted the bridge is located in a high-density area with a gas station/convenience store, hardware store, and dollar store in close proximity.

The project is in the early state of the "Project Definition" that focuses on explaining the need for the project, the alternatives available (i.e., bridge rehabilitation or replacement), obtaining feedback, and building consensus for the approach to be taken. Once this phase has been completed, the next stages are "Project Design" and "Construction." Ms. Stone noted Act 153 sets the local share for such projects at ten percent (10%) but this amount could be halved if the decision is made for rehabilitation rather than replacement and/or the bridge is kept closed to traffic during the construction phase. She noted the Main Street Bridge is owned by the municipality, was constructed in 1926, and underwent reconstruction in 1958. The bridge has sidewalks on both sides and there is a crosswalk at its north end. There also are below and above ground utility lines and pipes in the area that would have to be relocated.

Ms. Stone said the Scoping Report indicates that the sidewalks are in deteriorating condition and the bridge deck also is in poor condition. The bridge abutments and supports have been rated between fair and poor condition. River debris such as fallen trees, tree limbs, etc. frequently get caught on the existing support piers. The bridge itself is not historic but is located in a recognized historic district. Ms. Stone said VTrans would work with the municipality to ensure that any new bridge aesthetics, such as railing and light fixtures, would conform to its surroundings. The bridge underside might be a bat habitat so this will need to be further investigated. There also is the possibility that nearby former hazardous waste sites might have contaminated the area soil so it will need to be tested. If any contaminated soil is discovered, it would have to be removed by the municipality (at its own cost) before the project can proceed. Ms. Stone noted the bridge is heavily travelled with average daily traffic of 4,800 vehicles with about 580 vehicles per hour during peak traffic. About 8.2% of this traffic consists of heavy trucks.

Ms. Stone then presented the alternatives investigated in the Scoping Report. Given the bridge's age and poor condition, the "No Action" alternative is not considered feasible as it is suspected the bridge could become unstable within ten (10) years. "Rehabilitation" would involve fixing structural deficiencies and replacing bad concrete with new. This approach would add about fifteen (15) years of design life. "Superstructure Replacement" would have a new bridge deck and beams added to the existing substructure and would result in an additional thirty (30) years of bridge life. "Full Bridge Replacement" would be an entirely new structure and would have a design life of seventy-five (75). The old piers that catch debris would be removed and the result would be a single span bridge with sidewalks on both sides. As indicated in the report, VTrans recommends "Full Bridge Replacement."

The other decision that the Select Board members need to make is how to manage traffic during the bridge construction process, which is expected to take about twelve (12) weeks. The options include "Offsite Detour," which would have vehicular traffic bypass the construction area on nearby surface streets. Another option is "Phased Construction," which would allow one-way traffic on one side of the bridge while the other half is being repaired/constructed. However, this approach is more suitable for bridge rehabilitation and partial bridge replacement projects and not for full bridge replacements. It also is discouraged here due to the heavy traffic at this location that could lead to long backups. The other option is to construct a temporary bridge adjacent to the construction area.

Given that the detour length for passenger vehicles is less than one mile (0.8 miles), VTrans recommends the offsite detour option. Cars and light trucks would be detoured around the construction area using Wall Street and the upper end of Water Street. Ms. Stone said there is possibility of temporarily eliminating parking on the south side of Depot Square and having two-way traffic flow to Wall Street during the construction phase. Heavy trucks and tractor trailers that normally use Vermont Route 12 to travel from Northfield to Montpelier and beyond would be required to make use of Interstate 89. The pedestrian detour would make use of the footbridge at the intersection of Union Street and Water Street and ask northbound walkers to use the sidewalks along Pearl Street and Vine Street to access North Main Street.

Ms. Stone said the complete VTrans recommendation is for full bridge replacement accompanied by offsite traffic detour during construction. The total cost of this project is \$5,651,726. With the local share set at five percent (5%), the municipality would be responsible for \$282,586 of this amount. Deviating from the VTrans recommendations would double the local share to ten percent (10%). VTrans has budgeted for this project and the construction phase is scheduled for 2025. Ms. Stone said the Select Board members must decide next whether to accept the VTrans recommendations. Once this decision has been made, the project's conceptual plans will be developed. All the project documentation will be available throughout the process on the VTrans website at: <https://outside.vermont.gov/agency/vtrans/external/Projects/Structures/19J223>. She then asked if the Select Board members had any questions.

Board member Miller believes this was a very thorough presentation and had no questions at this time. Board member Stevens liked the single-span bridge approach and asked if this would lessen the bridge's length. Ms. Stone said there would be a slight decrease from one hundred and eleven feet (111') to one hundred and five feet (105'). Board member Stevens believes the proposed pedestrian detour is too long and might encourage some to make use of the railroad bridge that parallels the Main Street Bridge to the west. This has serious safety concerns so perhaps another approach is needed. Ms. Stone said pedestrians could use the north end of Water Street even though this road doesn't have sidewalk for the full length. This also could cause problems with the increased amount of vehicular traffic due to the detour. Chair Maxwell believes there is sufficient sidewalk on one side of the street. He then asked about the possibility of a temporary pedestrian bridge parallel to Main Street Bridge. Ms. Stone said this was possible but would double the local share amount (including the additional cost of the temporary bridge).

Board member Stevens asked how it would be possible to keep heavy trucks from using the downtown vehicular detour. Ms. Stone said local law enforcement could help maintain this ban. In addition, trucking firms would be informed well in advance about the need to use alternative routes. Board member Morse noted the current bridge lasted almost one hundred (100) years with support piers whereas the proposed design would eliminate them with a shortened expected life expectancy of seventy-five (75) years. Perhaps the piers should be retained if it means the bridge would last longer. Ms. Stone said VTrans designs bridges to standard design lives of no more than seventy-five (75) years. The bridge very possibly could last an additional decade or two. In any case, retaining the piers would not extend the expected life expectancy. The river debris problem is the main reason the piers would be eliminated and removing them would not impact bridge stability. Board member Morse asked if the relocation of above and below ground utilities would result in extra cost to the municipality. Ms. Stone said this relocation is considered part of the overall project and would not increase the local share.

Board member Morse asked if pedestrian traffic could be allowed on the bridge while it is being constructed. Ms. Stone said even if this was possible, this would result in doubling the local share amount to ten percent (10%). Board member Goodrich asked if flaggers would be installed along the detour route. Ms. Stone said there would be signage installed but did not think flaggers would be needed throughout the process. She added that the proposed detour route along Wall Street and Water Street is only VTrans' suggestion at this time. The Select Board members could decide on an alternate route for vehicular traffic. Board member Goodrich noted the construction phase is at least four (4) years away and asked if the provided cost estimates took this into account. Ms. Stone said these estimates did consider higher costs in the future. Board member Goodrich asked how much it would cost the municipality if contaminated soil was found and had to be removed. Ms. Stone said there was no way to estimate this until the contamination was found and identified. The cost would depend on how far the contaminated material had to be trucked away. Gary Laroche said the soil borings would be performed early in the project to determine how much (if any) soil contamination exists.

Bonnie Donahue was impressed with the information presented tonight. As a landscape designer who lives on the northern side of Water Street, she has an especial interest in this project. Ms. Donahue also serves on the Steering Committee of Northfield Ridge + River Routes (NRRR), which seeks "opportunities to better connect Northfield's population centers with each other..." Ms. Donahue sees this project as a chance to have the new bridge serve as an impressive gateway to the downtown area. She asked if the bridge project would comply with the "Complete Street" concept that promotes safe roadways accessible to peoples of all ages, abilities, and who make use of alternate forms of transit (i.e., bicycle, pedestrian, etc.). Ms. Stone said this evaluation would occur early in the scoping phase. Ms. Donahue would like the new bridge to have better lighting for pedestrians and perhaps dedicated bike lanes. Ms. Stone said such improvements could be included but any special "creature comforts" would have to be funded entirely by the municipality. She added that the current bridge lighting is merely functional. Ms. Donahue noted the upper end of Water Street has a couple sharp curves that might cause problems for vehicular traffic. Ms. Stone said temporary street lighting and other amenities could address safety concerns. Ms. Donahue felt this project might be a good opportunity for the municipality to improve beforehand the sidewalks along the vehicular and pedestrian detour routes. Ms. Stone agreed but noted any new sidewalk work would not be included in the project budget.

Lydia Petty also is a NRRR Steering Committee member and she also feels this project could dovetail with NRRR's goals for the community. She also would like to see the bridge designed with bicycle safety as a consideration. Ms. Petty thinks the possibility of residents using the railroad bridge as a pedestrian short cut is problematic so there should be a municipal effort to improve the downtown walking infrastructure before the current bridge is removed. Ms. Stone suggested that a downtown shuttle bus service could be put in place for senior citizens, etc. during the twelve (12) week construction phase.

Bill Clements is very supportive of the new bridge concept and believes the proposed downtown car detour is the shortest and best. He also would like to see some pedestrian improvements installed in the years prior to the proposed bridge construction. This could include better street lighting, new sidewalks, better crosswalks, etc.

Manager Schulz then thanked Ms. Stone and Mr. Laroche for the presentation. It was his assumption that the construction phase would last for several months if not a full year so he is pleased it is only projected to last about three (3) months. He then asked if this timeframe was realistic. Ms. Stone confirmed it was as VTrans has become quite proficient in accelerated bridge replacement so it might be even a shorter time period. Mr. Laroche said VTrans would have a better idea of the actual timeframe further into the design process based on the soil samples, etc. Chair Maxwell asked if the work would be performed during Vermont's traditional highway construction period (i.e., mid-April through October). Ms. Stone confirmed it would and VTrans will work with the municipality on the best timing for the community, such as waiting after NU graduation in early May. Chair Maxwell said it would be good to have the work completed before Northfield holds its elaborate Labor Day Weekend festivities. Board member Morse noted there are plans to remove the nearby Cross Brothers Dam and asked if there could be some coordination between the two projects. Manager Schulz said there has been some communication already between VTrans and the group spearheading the dam removal project. Chair Maxwell thanked Ms. Stone and Mr. Laroche again for the information provided tonight and looks forward to similar presentations in coming months and years.

IV. APPROVAL OF MINUTES

- a. **January 26, 2021 (Regular Meeting).** Motion by Board member Stevens, seconded by Board member Morse, to approve the minutes. The Select Board members requested some minor corrections to the minutes. **Motion to approve the amended minutes passed 5-0-0.**

V. APPROVAL OF BILLS

- a. **Approval of Warrant #15-21.** Motion by Board member Morse, seconded by Board member Goodrich, to approve Warrant #15-21 in the amount of \$340,601.31. Board member Goodrich asked about a webcam purchase. Manager Schulz said this was for Mr. Ignatowski's computer so he could better take part in remote meetings. He had been using his laptop for this. She then asked about invoices related to sludge transport from the Northfield Wastewater Treatment Facility (WWTF). Manager Schulz said the WWTF sludge used to be transported by Casella Waste Management to its landfill in Coventry, Vermont. However, a couple of years ago Casella stopped accepting it because the sludge was "too smelly." After storing the sludge on site for several months, the municipality reached an agreement with Barre City to store it at their facility before it was transported to a Canadian landfill. Now that steps have been taken to make the WWTF sludge less odiferous, Manager Schulz and Utility Superintendent Patrick DeMasi have been in contact with Casella about again allowing it at the landfill. They also have considered other options. Chair Maxwell asked about a \$1,000 payment for "State PFAs Sampling." Manager Schulz said the federal and state government recently have been requiring public utilities to sample their water systems for per- and polyfluoroalkyl substances (PFAs), which are highly toxic but used in a variety of common products. Fortunately, local tests have been negative for PFAs. Manager Schulz said if our water system goes two (2) full years without any positive tests, there would be a five (5) year respite from the requirement. **Motion passed 5-0-0.**
- b. **Approval of Biweekly Payroll through January 24, 2021.** Motion by Board member Morse, seconded by Board member Stevens, to approve the biweekly payroll in the amount of \$106,970.06. **Motion passed 5-0-0.**

VI. SELECT BOARD

- a. **Approval of Grand List Lodging Certificate (No Appeal or Suit Pending).** Manager Schulz said the Listers lodge the Grand List each year at this time. Before they do so, they must certify that there are pending appeals or ongoing tax suits related to the Grand List and the Select Board members must confirm this. Motion by Board member Morse, seconded by Board member Stevens, to approve the Grand List Lodging Certificate. **Motion passed 5-0-0.**
- b. **Select Board Public Hearing (Town Meeting Articles): Tuesday, February 23, 2021.** This public hearing is required by state law and will be held at the beginning of the next regular meeting. Manager Schulz said normally the focus of this public hearing is on the non-profit organizations seeking public funds but due to the cancellation of this year's Town Meeting Open Session due to COVID-19, there also will be a discussion of the proposed FY 2021-2022 municipal budget. This hearing is informational only and there can be no changes to budget line items, etc.

VII. TOWN MANAGER'S REPORT

- a. **Connecticut Attorneys Title Insurance Company Lawsuit.** As discussed at previous meetings, an out-of-state attorneys' group was suing nine (9) Vermont Town Clerks, including Northfield's, for restricting access to public records due to COVID-19 building closures, reduced hours, etc. Manager Schulz said a hearing was held a couple weeks ago (01/28/21) and testimony was provided by the town clerks and others. Surprisingly, the lawsuit was withdrawn by the plaintiffs before the end of the day. It now is hoped the Vermont State Legislature will address this matter with new legislation in order to prevent similar lawsuits from being filed in the future.
- b. **Northfield Town Report 2021.** Manager Schulz said the report has been delivered to the printer and hardcopies will be returned to Northfield by the middle of next week. Copies then will be distributed to a number of locations around town to be picked up. An electronic version (PDF) already is available on the municipal website at <https://www.northfield-vt.gov/town-reports>.
- c. **Northfield Ridge + River Routes (NRRR).** Manager Schulz said the NRRR final report was presented at a remote meeting recently (01/29/21). It next will be formally presented by the NRRR Steering Committee to the Select Board members at their next regular meeting. The Select Board members have had their own copies for several months and the report is available online.
- d. **Utility Accounts Online Review.** Manager Schulz said there was discussion at the last meeting (01/26/21) of providing Northfield water, sewer, and electric customers the ability to review their accounts online in addition to paying their bills by credit card (which is now possible). This would allow them to track their utility usage, etc. Preliminary investigation indicates this might be a very costly upgrade as it would require new software along with annual maintenance changes, etc. Manager Schulz said further research will be done to determine if there is a more cost-effective way to do this. He will try to have options and recommendations ready for the next meeting. Board member Stevens would like to see this convenience provided to our utility customers.

VIII. BOARD MEMBERS' COMMENTS, CONCERNS, QUESTIONS

- a. **Recent Subcommittee Meetings.** Board member Stevens serves on the Town Buildings & Energy Subcommittee (with Board member Goodrich) and on the Highway Planning & Project Oversight Subcommittee (with Board member Miller) and both met within the past two (2) weeks. The former subcommittee is working on a spreadsheet denoting the condition of all the municipal facilities. The Highway Subcommittee discussed the possibility of purchasing a Highway Roller and starting the process of privatizing some one-house roads.

- b. Municipal Project List.** Board member Morse was grateful for the “tickler” list from Manager Schulz. However, he hoped it could be updated and distributed more frequently in future.
- c. Backroads Electric Service.** Board member Morse noted his home electric service through Green Mountain Power (GMP) has become much more reliable since the agreement last year allowing GMP to hook onto the Northfield Electric Department (NED) distribution system in case their own failed due to storms, etc. Board member Morse had become used to periodic power outages due to winter storms but that hasn’t happened this year and he is grateful for this.
- d. Heating System Inspections.** Board member Morse asked who inspected heating systems in the municipal buildings. Manager Schulz said it was Gillespie Fuels, with whom the municipality contracts for heating fuel delivery. Inspections are done on an annual basis. Board member Morse has heard the Brown Public Library’s heating system is long overdue for its inspection. Manager Schulz will look into this and schedule an inspection (if needed).
- e. Turkey Hill Maple Farm Lease Agreement.** Board member Goodrich asked when local forester Rose Beatty will inspect the site. Manager Schulz spoke with her and they agreed it would be best to wait until early March as that is when the tapping equipment would be in place. Ms. Beatty’s report should be ready for Select Board review in early April.
- f. Open Meeting Law Minutes Posting Requirements.** Board member Goodrich noted the Select Board members received an email from a concerned citizen who felt certain municipal boards weren’t posting their minutes in a timely manner. Manager Schulz looked into this and found that the board chair responsible had experienced recent computer problems that caused some of this delay. He added that the state legislature, in response to COVID-19, has temporarily extended the online posting deadline from five (5) calendar days to ten (10), so the delay in this case wasn’t that extreme.
- g. Recent Community Losses.** Chair Maxwell noted the Northfield community lost two (2) valued members over the past couple weeks: Clark Leonard and Gregory Sanders. Both gentlemen were solid citizens and will be sorely missed.

IX. PUBLIC PARTICIPATION (UNSCHEDULED). There was none.

X. EXECUTIVE SESSION Motion by Board member Morse, seconded by Board member Miller, to go into executive session, in accordance with 1 VSA 313 (a)(1), in order to discuss a personnel matter with Manager Schulz present. **Motion passed 5-0-0.**

The Board went into executive session at 9:28 p.m.

Manager Schulz left the executive session at 9:51 p.m.

Motion by Board member Morse, seconded by Board member Stevens, to come out of executive session. **Motion passed 5-0-0.**

The Board came out of executive session at 10:29 p.m.

Motion by Board member Morse, seconded by Board member Stevens, to establish a Policy Review Subcommittee consisting of Select Board members Morse and Stevens. **Motion passed 5-0-0.**

XI. ADJOURNMENT. Motion by Board member Morse, seconded by Board member Stevens, to adjourn. **Motion passed 5-0-0.**

The Board adjourned at 10:30 p.m.

Respectfully submitted,

Kenneth L. McCann

Kenneth L. McCann, Acting Clerk

An audio recording of this meeting is available in the Town Manager’s Office.

These minutes were approved at the regular Select Board meeting of February 23, 2021.